

## EUSEBIUS.

The great ambition of Eusebius is to pass for a good preacher; therefore such, he will never be. Eloquence springs from conviction; but Eusebius cares little about being convinced himself, so as others acknowledge the power of his arguments. In preparing a sermon, his object is not to discover truth, but to find material for an effective discourse. He can thoroughly enough master his subject, but his subject does not master him. Thoughts and feelings are to him what colours are to a painter. He grinds them, spreads them out, unites or opposes them for the sole purpose of producing effect. As he is to preach on Sunday, let us see how he passes the previous week.

There he is, earnestly seeking not a text, not a subject, but what may be called picture frames to set off pathetic or alarming representations; these selected as the ground work of his discourse, he shapes and arranges them with most artistic care.

I think I see him now, pacing up and down the room, his arms crossed, his head bent. A thought arises ; he seizes a pen, and the first sentence is committed to paper. He thinks again, he ransacks his brain for a striking idea, then hastily writes it down, and so on till the manuscript is sufficiently long. At last the Amen is permissible ; Eusebius gathers the scattered pages, reads and corrects them and persuades himself he is satisfied. The whole is fairly copied out and learned by heart with much labour down to Saturday evening.

Sunday morning Eusebius is unusually solemn ; he speaks little, and sees no one. You think he is concerned for the salvation of souls ? Not at all ; but he is not sure that he knows his sermon.

The time of service draws near ; Eusebius walks to church and goes into the vestry. He puts on his gown and bands, prolonging his preparations so as to delay the fatal moment. If he could but find an excuse for not entering the pulpit ! For to say the truth ; he is full of fears. Perhaps his memory may fail him ; perhaps he may bring in a paragraph in the wrong place ; perhaps his most telling passage will be badly delivered ; perhaps even he may be obliged to have recourse to his manuscript. He shudders at the thought of failure, he is agitated with fear, yet in this state of actual

suffering, it never occurs to him to pray ! He ascends the steps of the pulpit but he does not pray ; he enters it, but he does not pray ; he bends his head, but he praying not is ; he is only appearing to do so for the sake of effect.

The reading of the liturgy is a happy respite for him ; then comes the giving out of a hymn, and the utterance of a prayer, supposed to be extempore, but which the congregation know by heart. By degrees his confidence is restored ; no very difficult matter !

He rises, and silently passes his hand over his forehead as if seeking ideas ; whereas ideas, sentences and words are all minutely and irrevocably arranged beforehand. At last he begins speaking slowly and solemnly, as if all worldly thoughts were far from him.

At first the hearers are most favourably disposed. They have come to be moved and edified, and wish the preacher to be successful. It is their own cause which is in court, and they are quite ready to be convinced. The pulpit is indulgently judged even by those who are critical else where. Eusebius knows this ; he relies on it, and uses or abuses the privilege as a means of enhancing his own importance. He drops his words one by one, on his listeners, as if by so doing, he increased their va-

lue; he spins out an idea, in order to make it last as long as possible. He has been talking for a quarter of an hour, but has said nothing yet. The congregation get impatient, and ejaculate mentally, but as they cannot speak out, Eusebius chooses to take their approbation for granted, and majestically closes a preamble full of pretension, but utterly devoid of connection with his subject.

But kings cannot live on thrones; they must needs descend sometimes to the level of their court. Thus Eusebius without very well knowing why, perhaps simply because it is difficult to walk continuously on stilts, proceeds with the first head of his discourse in a much more familiar tone. He has no wish to be simple (would that he had)! but it is pleasant to show the facility with which he modulates his voice. Besides, one who means to reach the top of the scale must economize his strength.

Eusebius then, announces the subject he means to develope. What it is I know not : all I know is that it has little connection with the Bible, the words of which are borrowed, while its truths are slighted. Probably you will find in his discourse a little of every thing except the Gospel.

Our friend soon perceives that his audience is unmoved. He, cannot change any thing in the dis-

course, already written and learned by heart, so he attempts to produce emotion in himself and his hearers in another way. He swells his voice, gesticulates energetically and strikes the desk in his endeavors to excite warmth. This method is perfectly successful when the body only is concerned, but unhappily, it has little influence on the mind. Eusebius utterly fails in his object, and his astonished audience merely ask themselves what he is about. As the outward sound and movement increase, all trace of real feeling is lost. Then a change comes over the congregation. Hearers are transformed into spectators. They came to hear the Gospel, and are obliged to witness a pantomime. Preacher and audience have alike abandoned their original position, the one appears on the scene without quitting the pulpit, the other may be said to be in the pit without quitting the pews. Sad perversion of sacred things!

I abstain from fully describing the oratorical display; the trembling voice, the false intonations; the fictitious emotion which imposes on no one, the simulated unction which revolts one's better feelings; the majestic tone which only produces wonder, the attempt at authority and menace which almost provoke a smile. The exact description of these would be like an act in a comedy,

which I am unwilling to mingle with so serious a subject. If the preacher is ridiculous, it is not my fault.

It is vexatious to think that Eusebius may contemplate this picture without recognizing it. Sometimes perhaps do not exactly fit the contour of his face; he thence concludes it was not meant for him, but thinks it wonderfully like his neighbour. Not impossible, for I had both in view! Yes Eusebius, not the other only, but you also. If you think this an insult I will add, I have been speaking from experience. Are you satisfied?

I must acknowledge that this subject perplexes and irritates me. I know so well the vanity of preachers, I am so convinced that they will be unmoved by the voice of criticism, that I am impatient at the weakness of my pen. I long for courage to go and take each Eusebius by the arm and shout in his ear, this is you, you, you! It may be Edward or John, or Thomas or Henry, but most positively it is you also, whatever your name may be!

Oh if I could get Eusebius into a corner, and my words could reach his heart encased in conceit, I would say to him: "You must think your congregation very blind, if you suppose they do not see through your ridiculous pretensions, or very foolish, not to be aware of the wide difference between your

feelings and your words. Do you not know that there is in the human voice a chord which inevitably betrays the secret thought? By this, the most unlearned can judge between affectation and true feeling. Do you not know that people who seem to listen with deference, revenge themselves for a tedious discourse the moment they quit the church? Oh yes, you know all this, for you have remarked it with regard to other ministers. You have quite pitied preachers to whom you listened without emotion, in spite of their elaborate harangues; here and there a phrase or simile may have pleased you, but on the whole you were thoroughly wearied, though you did not dare to say so. Well, my poor friend, this is exactly your own case. You also excite compassion, you also declaim without convincing. Your hearers, like yourself, lack courage to declare they are weary, but be assured, they feel it none the less. If they attend again, it is not to listen to you, but because it is Sunday”.

Not venturing to speak thus to my colleagues individually, I may at least tell them collectively, what I have heard and noticed.

I have often heard people speak of preachers, almost always pointing out their defects, very rarely their good qualities. I have remarked that

the mass discriminate real from false piety, sincerity from mere eloquence, as skilfully as our most cultivated men, and I have thence concluded that the Creator has endowed the human mind with a tact for the discovery of what is real and true, which acts instinctively, even amongst the uneducated. You may, by argument, easily shut the mouth of a peasant, but you cannot open his heart. He is the master of it, and will remain so in spite of rhetoric. He will judge you whether you will or no, and judge you to be just what you are. Even if you succeeded in moving him for a moment, he would afterwards attribute his emotion to the goodness of his own heart, and esteem himself a little more, and you a little less.

I think I hear Eusebius say with a smile :  
“ In truth, such common place men do attempt.... With me... me... of course it is different... but hush, that will do!” No, Eusebius, it will not do. Your case is worse than that of your common place imitators. That you have certain powers of mind, I admit; that your coterie admires you, I know; but because you receive applause, do you think esteem necessarily follows? It most assuredly does not. At ordinary times, your parishioners come to you; on special occasions they go elsewhere; in health they listen to you; in sickness



they seek another. You may join their festive gatherings, but you have no part in family meetings, nor in deathbed scenes. You please your friends, but you do not gain their confidence; they admire the grace of your attitudes, and the melody of your voice, but they think you an actor nevertheless, and the worst of it is that they are not far wrong!

I have sometimes been tempted to speak thus from the pulpit. “ My friends, I am as tired of sermons as you are; henceforth I will lay aside all pretension to style, and speak to you as I do to a friend on the street. I will try to be simple, honest, true; telling you just what I think, and as I think it. I hope you will listen with attention and interest, as it is for your benefit, not my own, that I speak. ” But on consideration, I saw it was better to make no such declaration, but to endeavour to act up to it. I have attempted it, but with how little success! The force of habit overcomes my best intentions; after a few of minutes of simplicity, I fall again into declamation. But I do declare that when I have been fortunate enough— let me speak more correctly and say—when I have been so far sustained from above as to remain simple and true, I have invariably enjoyed an unusual measure of peace of mind. I may add, that when I have suddenly

checked myself in an affected delivery, and resumed a natural tone, I have seen drooping heads raised, and wandering eyes fixed; my auditors thus taught me which was the right course.

Try it Eusebius! Try it, and you will find the benefit of the change. You may fail the first time, but succeed the second. And you will succeed if you are in earnest, have real faith in the gospel, and love to souls. If the ministry is to you merely a profession, you will never be simple, because you are in a false position. Imitation of simplicity is as bad as imitation of dignity; both are disguises and there can be no success in the pulpit without truth in principle and in practice.

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